

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 CCO-00 /026 W

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O 221329Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1853

S E C R E T BEIRUT 7619

EXDIS

FROM LANE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AEMR

SUBJECT: EVACUATION PLANNING

REF: (A) BEIRUT 7154, (B) STATE 231127

1. EMBASSY APPRECIATES DEPT'S THOUGHTS ON EVACUATION PLANNING IN REF B. RE PARA 2, REF B, WE ARE FULLY AWARE OF THESE DANGERS (SEE BEIRUT 7490) AND WILL KEEP DEPT INFORMED OF OUR ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION.

2. GIVEN DEPT'S DETERMINATION THAT IT WILL TAKE MINIMUM OF THREE DAYS FOR ASSISTANCE TO ARRIVE FROM SIXTH FLEET, WE WILL CONCENTRATE OUR PLANNING ON OVERLAND EVACUATION TO DAMASCUS. REF B SEEMS TO ASSUME (PARA 6) THAT PLO/FATAH/LAA ESCORT CAN BE OBTAINED EVEN "IF THE FIGHTING CATCHES EMBASSY BY SURPRISE." HOWEVER, IN SITUATIONS DESCRIBED PARAS 1(A), 1(B), AND 1(D), WE DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT SUCH ESCORTS WOULD BE AVAILABLE. DEPT WILL RECALL THAT EVEN IN LATE JULY EVACUATION, PLO DECLINED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR LAND CONVOY BECAUSE THEY CLAIMED ROUTE WAS UNSAFE. WITHOUT A RELIABLE ESCORT, BELIEVE WE WOULD BE SAFER IN DEFENSIVE POSITION IN BEST PROTECTED PART OF EMBASSY THAN IN SEEKING TO MAKE OUR WAY, UNESCORTED, ACROSS BATTLE LINES IN BEIRUT, EVEN IF THERE WERE A "LULL IN FIGHTING OR ARTILLERY SHELLING." RE LOCAL

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EMPLOYEES, IF WE ARE RUNNING A LAND CONVOY TO

DAMASCUS, WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO TAKE THEM WITH US AS FAR AS LEBANESE/SYRIAN BORDER AND LET THEM MAKE THEIR OWN WAY FROM THERE. IN COMBAT SITUATION, THEY WOULD PROBABLY HAVE A BETTER CHANCE TO CROSS THE BATTLE LINES WITH US THAN ON THEIR OWN.

3. BEIRUT 7546 SUGGESTS USE OF AL PEACE-KEEPING FORCE AS PROTECTIVE FORCE DURING ANY LAND EVACUATION. EVEN THOUGH THIS FORCE MIGHT BE UNWILLING TO TAKE A DIPLOMATIC CONVOY TO DAMASCUS, IT MIGHT TAKE US TO BEIRUT AIRPORT, WHERE PROTECTION COULD BE PROVIDED, SINCE PRESUMABLY AL FORCE WOULD AT LEAST DEFEND ITS HQ. WE WOULD APPRECIATE DEPT'S COMMENTS.

4. AT THE MOMENT, BEIRUT IS TENSE BUT WE HAVE NO INFORMATION THAT A CHRISTIAN/SYRIAN ATTACK IS IMMINENT. WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THE SITUATION CLOSELY, AND I WILL SEEK SPECIFIC WASHINGTON AUTHORIZATION BEFORE ACTING ON EVACUATION, AS INSTRUCTED REFTEL. HOWEVER, AS THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED IN BEIRUT ARE AWARE, OUR COMMO SECTION IS IN ONE OF THE MOST EXPOSED PARTS OF THE EMBASSY, AND ONE WELL-PLACED SHELL COULD PUT US OUT OF COMMUNICATION.

5. AT PRESENT, THERE ARE 24 LOCAL EMPLOYEES LIVING IN THE EMBASSY. WE HAVE ANNOUNCED FOUR-DAY WEEKEND HOLIDAY SEP 23-26 IN CELEBRATION OF PRESIDENT SARKIS' INAUGURATION AND ID AL FITR HOLIDAY (END OF RAMADAN), (NOW EXPECTED TO FALL ON SEP 25) WHICH SHOULD REDUCE SLIGHTLY NUMBER OF LIVE-IN LOCALS DURING THIS PERIOD.
LANE

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NNN

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